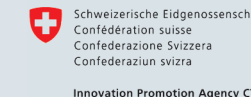


Entrepreneurs of innovation

Five portraits start-ups trained by Venturelab



Innovation Promotion Agency CTI

“We’re helping companies tighten their belts”

Founded by Raphaël Greppin, the start-up company Logifleet is making a name for itself as a pioneer in fleet management.

Thirty-seven year old Raphaël Greppin is a geographer and computer scientist with an interesting profile. “After my studies in geology at the University of Lausanne, I changed tack and went for a Master’s in information systems at EPFL. Then I worked as an independent consultant in GPS technology, a field that was still largely unrecognized in the early 2000s.” With this double experience under his belt, the young entrepreneur

started up Logifleet in 2002. “The company resulted from the fortuitous combination of my knowledge in geography and computer science,” he explains.

Logifleet optimizes the management of automobile fleets. Using its services, more than 100 Swiss transport companies are saving fuel every day. How? Through real-time computer monitoring based on GPS positioning, which makes it possible to manage the movements of staff.

“In April 2008, we obtained 2nd place in the PERL Trophy (Lausanne Regional Entrepreneurial Prize), which attracted the attention of Venturelab. I was offered “venture training,” one week in the company of a dozen entrepreneurs. The experience was very enriching, with lots of practical input; I was not only able to improve my skills in sales and marketing, but also in human resources. It was a very good experience!”



Raphaël Greppin, founder of Logifleet

“You have to work really hard to obtain initial financing”

Manuel Acevedo, founder of the start-up MadeinLocal.com, is developing a social network that lets everyone exchange their good ideas.

Having worked for years in the government of the canton of Geneva, Manuel Acevedo decided to start his own business. “I wanted to reinvent the idea of local shopping and participate in societal progress.” To do this, the EPFL communication systems graduate developed a social networking project, MadeinLocal.com.

“Social networks will reinvent local commerce,” he explains. “Electronic word of mouth is an effective and inexpensive promotional aid. I’m not interested in copying Facebook. I want to offer useful information and encourage people to benefit from real life – local life.”

The principle is simple: share your tips and recommendations with your friends and

benefit from their advice about local shops and services. For a fee, each shopkeeper has the possibility to manage his or her presence in the social network via an interactive window.



Manuel Acevedo, founder of Madeinlocal.com

To develop MadeinLocal.com, Acevedo found a suitable setting at EPFL, went through “venture training,” and then received “venture kick” support. “In order to overcome problems and obtain initial financing, you have to work really hard and be very persuasive,” the engineer emphasizes. “It’s also essential to present a tangible product to give life to the idea.”

“Switzerland is an excellent base for my company”

Ivan Orlov’s start-up company Octonus Suisse SA cuts diamonds to measure using a special software package.



Ivan Orlov, founder of Octonus Suisse SA

“Creating a company has always made sense to me.” Russian native Ivan Orlov studied electronics at the University of Moscow. At that time he worked with a Russian start-up that designed software for cutting diamonds. With this know-how in hand, he arrived in Switzerland in 2001 to earn a PhD in crystallography at EPFL. All that time, Orlov kept the idea of starting his own company in the back of his mind. He took advantage of “venture challenge” training to acquire the

tools he needed to launch his start-up. “That class taught me critical knowledge and allowed me to meet a partner for starting Octonus.”

Finally, Orlov took the leap in October 2007, creating Octonus Suisse SA, a start-up specializing in diamond design. Was it a rough start? “No,” Orlov responds. “I didn’t have any particular problems because Switzerland is an excellent base for companies. There’s a thorough knowledge of patents here. That allowed us to make sure that our creations were not copied.”

Octonus commercializes software that analyzes the structure of a diamond as well as the way it refracts light. “The diamond market is very conservative,” he says. “For 30 years, only two kinds of cuts have dominated the market.” Using the Octonus software, it’s now possible to test new ways of cutting these gems, a process that up to now has been prohibitively expensive.

“I’ve become an entrepreneur totally by chance”

Bulane sells a water purifier for areas where access to drinking water is problematic.

“I became an entrepreneur totally by chance,” smiles Isabelle Genoud. In 2006, the young woman launched her start-up company Bulane. “Before that, I had no desire to lead my own company.” It all began with the work of her associates Pierre Leitgib and Claes Berglund. The two engineers developed a water purifier called Watalys. The machine produces a chlorinated disinfectant solution by electrolysis that make water safe for drinking.

Having worked at the International Red Cross and the U.N. Human Rights Commission, Genoud understood the utility of the product for non-governmental organizations. “A structure had to be created to distribute this machine, so we decided to start our own company.” In 2005, the project received 100,000 Swiss francs in financing from the Vigier Foundation. “This support was

crucial for getting started.” The hardest part was just beginning for Genoud. “I had no experience leading a company,” she concedes. “Being an entrepreneur is very hard. You have to have great strength of character, curiosity and be able to adapt constantly.” To learn the ropes, she took a week of “venture training” in 2007. “Thanks to Venturelab, I was able to make great professional contacts and receive good advice for developing the company.”

In December 2008, Bulane succeeded got new investors. “We established a three-year development program and should break even in 2010.”



Isabelle Genoud, founder of Bulane

“I found everything I needed for my company in Switzerland”

Just a year after his arrival in Lausanne, Giorgio Pietramaggiore created the start-up company Capsol.

Why choose between being a surgeon, a researcher or an entrepreneur when you can be all three at the same time? Giorgio Pietramaggiore, a student of surgery at the Geneva University Hospitals (HUG), has launched a start-up company while still in his studies. “My

position at HUG gives me access to the clinical world. That’s very important when you’re developing a biotech startup,” explains the 31-year-old Italian.

Capsol develops coating techniques that improve the biocompatibility of medical devices. “We are already in discussion with the number three worldwide in breast implants, to transfer our silicon implant coating technology. Then we’ll go after the

orthopedic prosthesis market.” Coming to EPFL in 2008 to finish a thesis started at Harvard, Pietramaggiore took a “venture plan” course in the spring of 2008, which introduced him to a coach provided by the Swiss government’s innovation promotion agency (CTI). Since then Capsol has obtained the first two phases of “venture kick” support (30,000 Swiss francs) and has just received “Discovery Project” support from the CTI. “I can easily see myself living in Switzerland with my wife, who is a doctor at the HUG,”

concludes Pietramaggiore. “I’ve found everything I need for my company here: coaching, training and connections.”



Giorgio Pietramaggiore, founder of Capsol

Venturelab: Innovation for job creation

Venturelab, a national program of the Swiss Federal Innovation Promotion Agency (CTI), offers training modules to support young, innovative companies and to introduce students to the idea of entrepreneurship.

Courses are free of charge, but selective, for those whose projects have a strong innovation/high tech component.

Venturelab works in close collaboration with ETH Zurich and EPFL, Swiss universities and professional schools.

For more information: www.venturelab.ch

VENTURE IDEAS
Students and entrepreneurs meet one another

An interactive day for networking with exceptional entrepreneurs, experts, and for comparing projects.

VENTURE PLAN
Entrepreneurs in the starting blocks

For five days in a one-month period, 20 candidates are selected per session. Indispensable tools for putting together a business strategy and preparing a business plan.

VENTURE CHALLENGE
Students, PhD, students, post-doctoral researchers

A semester course for acquiring the essential know-how to create a start-up.

VENTURE TRAINING
Operational companies

Five-day seminar over a one-month period, 12 candidates selected per session. Accelerating start-up growth.